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Vocabulary Readers

Going Back to Harlem



by Stanford Makishi

Number of Words: 522

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Printed in the U.S.A.

ISBN: 0-618-64973-5

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Strategy Focus

As you read, **evaluate** how well the author describes Arthur Mitchell's life.

Key Vocabulary

daydreaming imagining

desolate dreary; empty

express put into words

previous occurring before something else

relieve help or ease

stoop stairway leading to a door

Word Teaser

You're dreaming, but you're wide awake. What are you doing?

Arthur Mitchell was born in 1934, in a part of New York City called Harlem. The neighborhood was busy and full of energy. Many talented African American writers, musicians, and artists lived there.



▲ Harlem in the 1930s

But life in Harlem wasn't always easy. Many families, including Arthur's, were poor. Some lived in shabby, **desolate** apartments. Rents were high. Jobs were few. For kids like Arthur, the only escape came through **daydreaming** about a different life.



Arthur started working when he was still a kid, to earn money for his family. But at around the same time, he learned to tap dance. When he didn't have to work, Arthur danced. While other kids were playing or hanging out on **stoops** and porches, Arthur practiced his moves.

Then, when Arthur was 13, an adviser from his school saw him dancing. The adviser urged Arthur to try out for a special school, called the High School of Performing Arts. The school trained students to be actors, singers, musicians, and dancers. It was just a subway ride away from Harlem.



Arthur tried out for the school and got in! He began to study modern dance and ballet. He did very well. He became the first male student to win the school's award for best dancer.

After high school, Arthur got into the School of American Ballet in New York City. It was the best ballet school in the country. There, Arthur would dance with some of the best ballet students in the world. He would have to prove that he was a great dancer, too.

As an African American, he had a lot to prove. In those days, there were very few African American ballet dancers. Many people did not want to give African American dancers a chance.



Arthur Mitchell was ready for the challenge. He became one of the school's top dancers. People raved about him. Soon, the people in charge of New York's best ballet company heard about his dancing. They asked him to join their company. At age 21, Mitchell became the first African American man to join a major ballet group.



Mitchell quickly became a star. He spent many years with the ballet company. He danced in New York City and in countries around the world.

**Arthur Mitchell dancing
with the New York City Ballet**



Then, in 1968, Arthur returned to Harlem. Some people wondered why he left his exciting life with the ballet company. During the **previous** year, he had danced in front of cheering crowds. What could be better than that?

But Mitchell had a new goal. He wanted to do something to **relieve** the problems and struggles of people in Harlem. In this way, he could **express** his love for his hometown.

Mitchell decided to teach ballet classes in Harlem. When he began, he had 20 students. After four months, there were 800! A year later, Arthur started the Dance Theatre of Harlem. The theater put on shows and ran a ballet school for children.

Today, the Dance Theatre of Harlem teaches about 1,000 students. Its dancers perform all over the world. The school gives Arthur Mitchell and the people of Harlem even more reasons to be proud of their hometown.



Responding

Putting Words to Work

1. Complete the following sentence:
The playground looked **desolate** on a cold, rainy day because _____.
2. What feelings about Harlem does Arthur Mitchell **express**? How do you know that he cares about the children of Harlem?
3. How did dancing **relieve** the hardships in Arthur Mitchell's life?
4. Can **daydreaming** help you achieve your goals? Explain your answer.
5. **PARTNER ACTIVITY:** Think of a word you learned in the text. Explain its meaning to your partner and give an example.

Answer to Word Teaser

daydreaming

Word Builder

Many words begin with the letters *exp*, like the word **express**. Think of as many *exp* words as you can. Then copy the chart and write down the words and their meanings. Use a dictionary if you need help.

Word	Meaning
express	put into words

Write About It

Write a paragraph that describes how you can **express** one feeling in different ways. Use some of the words from your completed Word Builder chart.

Key Vocabulary

daydreaming

desolate

express

previous

relieve

stoop

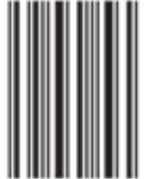
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ISBN 0-618-64973-5



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